

Cold

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Summary: It's sort of funny to think about it - whatever came before, you never imagined it would end like this. There was fire, great roiling roasting flames that surged up to the vaulted red-tile ceiling of a great tower, and blood and shouts. You were there, you saw it and heard it, you felt the heat lick your skin and scales... and then it was cold.

***Chapter 1*: Cold**

I basically wrote this while riding a wave of Proxian FEELS and... yeah... this probably isn't great but I liked the results anyway. I don't own Golden Sun or any of the characters, settings, etc. It's all Nintendo/Camelot.

Please, feel free to tell me what you think in reviews.

You wake in darkness and silence. Everything is empty. Everything is gone, fallen, *lost*, and you cannot remember why or how, only that there should be something there, and there is not. Things swirl together a little in flurries of memory, little eddies of sound and color along the pulsing current of your thoughts. The blackness and the thick curtain of void that blocks out all sound and sight covers everything around you, muffling the mysteries of the outside world, so you retreat inside to the vivid yet infuriatingly blank snippets of memory.

It's sort of funny to think about it - whatever came before, you never imagined it would end like this. There was fire, great roiling roasting flames that surged up to the vaulted red-tile ceiling of a great tower, and blood and shouts. You were somewhere in that scene, but you can't pick out where. Somewhere, you're sure. You were there, you saw it and heard it, you felt the heat lick your skin and scales... and then it was cold.

You're fairly sure it wasn't supposed to be cold. The sensation in the memory is terrible and foreign and brings back the briefest flickers of shrieking laughter and an icy stream in some long-ago snowbound winter, but it warps and twists into something a thousand times stronger and so

much worse. The cold is overpowering, biting and piercing and seeping under scales (you never thought you had so many scales), chipping away at your insides. You knew cold, you knew ice and shivering, but never like this. You lived all your life in bleak tundra and the protective hideaway of your cozy village with homes so carefully guarded against the snow and winter winds that came through the whole year, but only now are you learning what it truly feels like to have the cold penetrate your own natural (magical, something says inside) warmth that surrounded you since forever. You are not sure what to make of any of this, and you think you might have said something about it, but it's difficult to tell.

The choking darkness recedes a little, somewhere outside the haven of your mind, and you step free of the rippling vibrant stream to take a peek. You lift a single aching eyelid and peer about. Above you still hangs the vaulted red-tiled ceiling, majestic as ever. Your mind picks out the distant dark smudges, here and there, and little snapshots of moments flicker, by too fast to see, like light reflected off ocean waves. Blasts of dry heat and crackling striking flames, from both sides of the fight. Dimly, you wonder if you took part in it.

Back in reality, everything hurts. The light on your eyes is too bright and harsh, flashing at you from tiling and icicles. There are icicles on your gloves, crystals of snow on your eyelashes. Your short hair forms a nest for your head, sticking every which way, while the long rat's-tail section has come undone and fans out around you as if you were underwater.

You cannot move.

You learn this as you make your first attempt to shift, ever so slightly, and the world erupts into agony. Your right arm in

particular is a screaming mess of pain - *broken, shattered by the girl's staff*, a memory whispers - and the involuntary hiss of breath and cursing only worsens it as the frozen air sears your throat and lungs.

Another flicker. Another memory.

You were blazing, rising beyond all you were before - the boy had never seen you like this, never truly seen any of you like this. None of them had. Not even the other who stood beside you - his name is missing from the picture, a gap in the descriptions - knew this could happen or even exist. Then you see him. Him. The embers inside your heart reach up and set the picture afire before you know what's happening. There is a face in your mind, though she is not there.

Menardi. *But how are they connected?* some foolish part of you asks. The forgotten part of you answers back. *He killed her.*

He's the one you'd been searching for, the one you fought before Felix (*weak, quiet Felix, your sister's student, the outsider, the wild card*) stopped you. The rage and sorrow and grief all comes rushing back, a tidal wave of memory that forces you back into your mind again, blotting out the tiles and snow and sensation. The throbbing hole where your sister was pulses through the emotion, pushing the flow of memory faster and faster.

Menardi, training for hours outside your little home, setting little chips of wood alight with a touch...

At the docks, you see her flashing you a rare smile from behind her warrior's mask, telling you she and her partner (lover, in your mind) would return soon as heroes...

The first letter you got back, saying things hadn't gone as planned, telling you (in her stubborn way) how they had taken a pair of Valean captives for safety and were being pursued by some pair of second-rate templars...

Letters growing further apart and more hasty, and news that the templars had picked up companions and were proving more stubborn than before...

The elderly sage's brow growing furrowed and Felix (how had he come this far alone?) alternately cringing and gaping at the small girl's brutal honesty as she spoke.

"You won't see Menardi or Saturos again. Isaac killed them! They're probably at the bottom of the sea by now."

For the first few seconds you prayed to all the gods you knew, to Tiamat and the Kirin Riders and who knew what else, that it was just a show of childish bravado. Then you saw the others' faces and knew she spoke the truth. That they were serious.

That your sister was gone.

For the months that followed, you can barely recall any details. The memories are written over by your desperate thirst for vengeance, as you followed the trail of this faceless enemy, Isaac. You picture him as a hulking monster, sent out by the people of Vale in some petty attempt to reclaim their treasures. A hunter, whose only purpose in the end was to kill. You suppose that is what you have become, as well. A hunter, meaning solely to find one man and end him, as if that could bring her back. You once claimed you were not truly blinded by your rage, but now you understand your vision was still clouded.

The hatred and fury enflames your mind even now, painting charred and glowing borders around the sights and sounds that come next. The fight. There is faint shadow of something else, just for a moment - a giant watching eye surrounded by stone and bound by the power of ancients, watching you, judging you, and the voice like mountains moving that told you you were not worthy, told you of your bitter spiteful intentions and tried to show you what you were even though you didn't listen.

You changed then. You and your partner (*Agatio*, you think as the name returns) morphed into shrieking furious aberrations, creatures which you now suspect might have never been meant to exist. Your sister told you in the old stories how your race were the descendants of the dragons from the golden age, fallen to earth and taking on the forms of men, but never quite the same. They said that the dragons had made their choice, long ago: aside from the few who remained in their original form, like Tiamat and Eclipse, your kind could never return to the shapes they once took. They were stuck as people, forever. And yet, here you rose, scaled and fanged and winged, roaring in the deep rooms of the sacred lighthouse.

It dawns upon you that this was what you had become on the inside, too - a true dragon, your heart full of such fire and anger and revenge. You aren't sure if you should feel proud or horrified.

The revelation seems to calm the raging currents of recollection, and your headache fades just a bit. You understand now. Slowly, the flow trickles to a stop, and the outside returns. You are still lying in the false snow on the iced-over tiles, and the darkness is gone. With all the red around you, you barely even noticed the blood pooling at

your side and dripping down your face and arms. There is far too much for you to walk away from this.

A shape slides in front of you, blurry at first, then resolving itself into the distinct shape of a person. Felix stands over you. He's bleeding from a triad of cuts along one cheek, and you're fairly sure you made them. To your left, you hear Agatio groan and shift. You cannot see his wounds, but you imagine they are painful as yours, if not worse, and you find yourself reluctantly impressed by his efforts.

"Felix...? Is that you?" His voice is raspy and weak. It seems he will not be leaving either.

Felix nods silently. He barely ever spoke in your memories, though you were never sure why. Agatio keeps talking, and you wonder if he even noticed the response. "I guess... our luck hasn't run out just yet."

You hear a soft shifting noise, and the clink of glass on stone. "Felix..." he wheezes. "You must... complete our quest..."

No answer.

"We can't even stand," you add. "We are in no condition to go on. Light the beacon for us. Please."

"Felix..." Agatio continues, copying you. "Please..." Still nothing. "You have to... light the beacon."

At last, your comrade falls silent. The hiss of each struggling breath echoes in the cold and unforgiving stone chamber, and soon enough that falls silent as well. Faint murmurs of others, forgotten until now, bring more colorful shapes dancing at the edges of your vision. When they don't clear away after a few hard-won blinks, you decide they must be Felix's friends.

In the corner of your eye, you see Felix's glove-clad hands. They carefully lift and pry open your dead companion's fist, peeling away the blueish fingers to reveal a bright red orb clutched within. He picks the relic up and slips it into a pocket, then lets the hand fall back to the floor.

You are still cold. So cold.

He reaches out to you, and you do your best to pull away even as your ribs slide in ways they shouldn't and every part of you cries for mercy, for the cold to numb your pain rather than amplifying it with each movement. If he means to simply loot your corpse, he could at least have the respect to wait until you are dead to do it.

Instead, he does something you didn't expect. He holds your hand. His own fingers are so warm, radiating their heat through the thick and worn leather. You know he is no fire adept, and the mundane warmth tells you how cold you must be inside as well.

You find yourself oddly fond of him. A bit late for that, but still... he is so warm. Drunk with this new emotion, you say something you never thought you'd say. It sounds silly and sentimental the moment the words leave your lips, and yet you mean it.

"Your hands... so warm."

You feel a new wave of heat that isn't his. It almost fools you into thinking your strength might be returning, but you recognize it as little more than a slight blush. You suspect it would be stronger if you had more blood left in you.

For some reason you can't identify, you keep going.

"People have such warm hands," you mumble. "I... had forgotten..."

The darkness returns in full force now, blanketing the world around you, draping over the red-tiled floors and ceilings. The words in the corners of the room are gone. Even the ragged sounds of your own breathing are just white noise now.

It is several seconds before he answers.

"I'm sorry. For all of this. It never should have happened."

The rest of his words are muffled and distant, as if from miles away. You are falling, deep into the darkness and the thick snowdrifts of cold you were never meant to truly feel. The waters of memory reclaim you, seizing you up and dragging you down. You are surrounded by brittle shards of rock and ice at the bottom of the river, and it all fades to snow and cold. Even the pain is gone.

You drift for a little while after as a phantom, watching. Agatio is nowhere to be found in this blizzard-filled dreamscape, presumably off doing whatever he does in his free time. You didn't really ask a lot of questions about him when you were alive, though you don't plan to start now. You follow Felix instead, and observe.

You see him and his friends venture up further into the lighthouse, further than you ever could. You see him make it all the way to the top, hand already in his pocket, when the eye appears. The conversation is silent to you, but you get the gist of it. The rocky eye who judged you (it seems so long ago already) judges him as well, and you realize that as wise as he was in the end, he still has motives. He can still be corrupted by them.

The dragons rise, and you guess the trick quick enough. The fight is over too soon, but the casualties are not to be forgotten. Their parents lie dead before them and by their hands. The stone eye has only one trick, but he will make the most of it nonetheless. They grieve, and you are surprised to notice you feel no joy when the boy you hated for so long, Isaac, kneels to cradle the remains of his father. He does not look at all like the villain you pictured him to be - just a boy, younger than Felix even, pretending he is a true warrior and hero the same way you once did.

You feel sorry for him.

Felix stands now, hand reaching again into his pocket and drawing out the orb. It's so small, just a trinket, and yet it managed to cause all this. The idea seems so bizarre and incongruous, you are laughing before you even know why.

"What's the joke?" A familiar voice startles you, and you stop and turn.

You never thought you'd hear that voice again.

Menardi - *your sister, your teacher, your best friend* - stands behind you in ghostly form, watching as well. Her pale hair hangs down her back and flies about as she moves, just like it has for as long as you can remember. Her ruby eyes flash like bright coals as she smiles. "Hey, sis. Miss me?"

There is no need for words. There is only you, your sister, your sudden arms around her, and the ethereal chill of your embrace. This cold does not hurt at all, though, and even if it did it wouldn't matter. You would feel it a thousand times over if it meant feeling your sister's embrace again.

"I tried so *hard*," you sob into the front of her dress. "To avenge you. To finish what you started."

"I know," she whispers back. "I know."

After a moment, you ask, "Why are you here?"

"I wanted to see this for myself," she tells you. "Felix has come a long way since I last knew him." She nods in his direction as she speaks. "Saturos would probably want to see it as well."

"Is it wrong," you wonder aloud, "That I don't feel such hatred for your killer anymore?"

"Him?" she questions, gesturing to Isaac. He still sits, head bowed and eyes on his father's face. Waiting for him to come back, even if he's already gone.

"Yes," you answer.

She shakes her head. "That one's half our fault. They were pretty damn stubborn, but so were we."

You glance back to the scene, watching as Felix drops the tiny crimson star into the depths of the lighthouse well. Just as you saw at Jupiter Lighthouse, the aerie trembles and shakes, and the beacon arises in a glorious swirling mass of color. The amber brightness of the blazing sphere is blinding at first, shooting out wild blasts of heat and light like a sun in miniature, but dims to a gentle glow in a matter of seconds. You feel a surge of relief, seeing the beacon lit after all this. You might not have *lived* to see it, but at least you were there. You sense another burst of energy, and two more somewhere off in the distance as the other lighthouses respond to the final lighting.

The children in heroes' clothes gather themselves up and start the long journey back down the lighthouse. They carry

in their arms no treasure or plunder, only their parents' still bodies.

You hope they will do better than you did. That they will not spend their lives in rage and grief, searching for the rocky eye who sent their parents to die atop the lighthouse. That they will learn, in time, that there is room to move on.

Menardi turns to leave, stepping down the edge of the aerie and floating off towards the thickening wave of snowflakes. You follow her, light as wind, and vanish in a wisp of smoke.

You do not mind the cold anymore.